



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

Child abuse prevention awareness

Children who are abused or neglected, including those who witness domestic violence, often exhibit social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral problems, such as depression, suicidal behavior and difficulty in school. High-risk health behaviors include: use of alcohol and other drugs and early sexual activity. For those children who are abused or neglected, the long-term effects may extend into adolescence and adulthood and affect future generations.

Child abuse/neglect is found in families of all socioeconomic levels and ethnic groups and often goes unreported. A variety of risk factors exist for child abuse/neglect. Primary among them is parental substance abuse. State child welfare records indicate that substance abuse is one of the top two problems exhibited by families in 81% of reported cases. Another risk factor is domestic violence. Research shows that in 30% to 60% of families that experience domestic violence, children are also abused. Other contributing factors include parental mental illness, poverty, and child disability. Prevention of child abuse and neglect requires a commitment from communities to provide emotional, social, and financial support systems for families.

The following are some important child abuse prevention awareness questions:

- What can I do to foster healthy child development in my community?
- Am I knowledgeable about the local and federal legislation that supports child abuse prevention?
- How can I support child abuse prevention at the local and federal levels?

Research from the Center for Disease Control

Recent research from the Center for Disease Control's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) study demonstrates that childhood trauma may contribute significantly to the development of numerous adult health conditions, including alcoholism, drug abuse, heart disease and more. However, few federal resources are dedicated to bringing the medical profession into full partnership with law enforcement, the judiciary, and social workers, in preventing, detecting, and treating child abuse and neglect.

Reporting Child Abuse

If you know or suspect that a child is currently being abused, has been abused in the past, or is at risk of abuse call: 1-800-632-4615 (24 hours daily) or, contact your local police department.

Resources for Child Abuse Prevention

Parental Stress Hotline: 1-888-220-7575

Childhelp USA: 1-800-422-4453 (24 hour assistance for individuals under stress)

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Support Network for Battered Women: 1-800-572-2782

Sonoma County Child Protective Services Reporting Line: 707-565-4304

California Parenting Institute: 707-585-6108

How to be a positive parent while correcting negative behavior

Next to love, one of the best gifts parents and caregivers can give their children is a clear and consistent set of limits. Because discipline is often confused with punishment, many parents and caregivers may be reluctant to discipline their children, but doing so is very important. According to Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, one of America's leading pediatricians, discipline teaches children acceptable boundaries meant to prevent them from making mistakes, whereas punishment simply addresses negative behavior and doesn't help children learn from the experience.

Proper discipline--not punishment--is critical to the growth of a healthy and happy child. The challenges of raising a child can sometimes leave parents wondering how to set appropriate limits. To help, First 5 Sonoma County provides the following tips for correcting negative behavior while still being a positive parent.

Dos and don'ts of discipline:

- **Set age-appropriate limits:** Keep your child's age in mind when thinking about discipline. Children do not understand the concept of "yes" and "no" until they're approximately 12 months old. At this age, they'll begin to test limits. Children's ability to understand "right" from "wrong" develops as they get older.
- **Be consistent:** It is important to stick with the rules and consequences you set. If you don't, your child isn't likely to stick to them either. Consistency helps your child learn that his or her behavior has a specific result. Inconsistency confuses children and encourages them to test limits.
- **Include your child in the solution:** Help your child learn from mistakes by including him or her in the solution. For example, if your child purposely spills a cup of milk, give him or her a cloth to clean it up.
- **Teach acceptable behavior:** Children learn by experiment. For example, a baby who keeps throwing a spoon off the high chair is not purposefully misbehaving; he or she just thinks it's a game when those nearby keep picking it up. Instead of simply saying "no," try redirecting your child's attention to a more acceptable behavior. In this situation, you could remove the spoon and help your child drink from his or her cup.
- **Be encouraging:** Use praise and encouragement whenever possible to promote good behavior. Praise is especially effective when it's specific. Don't just say, "Good job." Instead say, "You did a good job putting your toy back where it goes." Remember that a little praise goes a long way.
- **Model appropriate behavior:** Your child watches you closely for cues on how to behave. Children imitate their parents and caregivers and the old saying, "Do as I say, not as I do" doesn't work with kids. Be calm, but firm, when setting limits and model behaviors you're trying to emphasize, such as sharing and saying "please" and "thank you."
- **Never use physical punishment:** Shaking or hitting your child is never appropriate. Physical punishment teaches your child that violence is a way to solve problems. Young children tend not to learn from physical punishment because they don't usually see the connection between their behavior and physical punishment.
- **Don't shame or belittle a child:** When your child misbehaves, be sure to clearly tell him or her that it's his or her behavior that's unacceptable. Shaming or belittling your child damages his or her self-esteem. Use a respectful, encouraging tone of voice and avoid harsh words. This helps prevent hurting your child's self-image and promotes your child's willingness to cooperate.

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org